DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 814 CS 507 046

AUTHOR Clark, J. S. Candy
TITLE Tne Exercise of Argument in Debate: Constructing Decision Parameters.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Communication Skills; *Debate; *Models; *Persuasive Discourse; Public Policy
IDENTIFIERS Cross Examination Debate Association; Debate Theory; National CEDA Tournament; Policy Negotiation Simulation; Value Debates

ABSTRACT

A study suggests a new approach for evaluating debate techniques. Previously used paradigms all have some disadvantages. Application of the policy-making paradigm, which involves isolating a problem, having one side propose a solution, then having the opponent point out the solution's disadvantages, is difficult because the paradigm does not require a participant to offer a specific plan. The hypothesis-testing paradigm is problematical in that attempting to superimpose scientific method upon academic debate is difficult and may result in a superficial discussion of issues. The tabula rasa paradigm is unworkable because it requires critics to put aside biases and to be guided by the directions of inexperienced debaters. A new paradigm based on the skills exhibited by participants would allow the critic to render a decision and assist in the educational development of each student. Debaters could choose arguments while demonstrating understanding of relevant theories and debate techniques. This could improve the level of argument. (SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315814

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J.S. Candy Clark

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Exercise of Argument in Debate: Constructing Decision Parameters

by

J.S. Candy Clark
Department of Communications
Southwest Missouri State University
Springfield, Missouri 65804

Increasingly students engaged in value debate as represented in the activities of the Cross Examination Debate Association are addressing issues of theory. As the practice increases, it has become evident that the literature and relevant theory specific to value debate is terribly lacking. One such area is the concept of decision making paradigms in debates on propositions of value. Students, coaches and judges all seem to be increasingly aware of the need to place the debate in some sort of definitive decision making paradigm in order to clarify issues and give debaters and judges some sort of guidance in deciding the outcome of academic debates. The purpose of this paper is to suggest a new approach to evaluating value debates. It is important to note that this paper is designed to apply only to the realm of CEDA debate and is not necessarily intended to be cross applied to the area of policy debate.[1]

[1]The term "policy debate" refers to the type of debate best represented by the National Debate Tournament or NDT. The term "value debate" refers to the type of debate best represented by the Cross Examination Debate Association or CEDA. Although increasingly artificial, both organizations maintain their independence by asserting that NDT argues policy topics while the focus of CEDA remains on topics of value.

CS507046

Existing Paradigms: Applicability to CEDA

Most of the existing literature relevant to decision making paradigms has been written specific to policy debate. Constructing a formalized rational to justify a decision seems a bit easier when the debate focuses on specific policy options. Often, the plan in a policy round functions as a safety net for both the teams involved and the critic. When all else fails, the plan represents the exact interpretation of the resolution as presented by an Affirmative. From an argumentative standpoint, it is much simpler to logically compare arguments and weigh the advantages and/or disadvantages of a specific policy. Unfortunately, no such safety net exists in a value debate. For that reason alone the more standard paradigms available in a policy round are not totally applicable to a CEDA round.

One of the most popular and most easily understood paradigms available from the policy realm is that of the "policy-making" paradigm. This perspective places the debate round in basically a legislative setting with the Affirmative charged with isolating a problem, proposing a solution the isolated area and offering advantages to that solution. The judge functions as the policy maker charged with finding perhaps not the "best" solution but the most advantageous solution. The debate focuses on the advantages offered by the Affirmative and the disadvantages

offered by the Negative. Ground in the debate is initially assumed to be equal. The negative can deny the need for a change and/or deny the advisability of the specific policy offered by the Affirmative.

Although the policy-making paradigm is rather simplistic, it is easy to understand and apply to a policy debate round. Unfortunately, transferring the paradigm into a CEDA round is very troublesome. Without the specificity of a plan, it is very difficult to consistently or fairly compare any policy, existing or new.[2] In perhaps an attempt to place CEDA rounds in a more comfortable or familiar context, the concept of "policy implications" have replaced the specific plan required in a policy debate. Instead of having mandates offered via specific plan planks, policy implications in a CEDA debate require almost a leap of faith on the part of the teams and the judge. Whereas policy debates require the Affirmative team to offer a specific plan of action designed to represent their conception of the resolution in order to meet their burden of proof, CEDA debate simply assumes a resolutional action. After that leap, CEDA rounds become quite similar to policy rounds with each team

[2]The author notes the increasing trend on the part of Affirmative teams to offer plans in CEDA. Unfortunately, this is another area in desperate need of theoretical clarification. It is the position of this author that unless a resolution contains a specific agent of change, implementing any specific policy is illegitimate.

discussing the advantages and/or disadvantages of the resolutional action.

Even with the advent of policy implications in CEDA debate, application of the policy-making paradigm is difficult. Although there is some comparison of policies, the lack of specificity in a CEDA rounds renders a true application of a policy-making paradigm useless. Whereas the plan in a policy round offers a direct policy option, any policy implication in CEDA remains ambiguous. More importantly, a policy maker can often reject a specified policy option due to a procedural or administrative flaw such as failing to fund the plan. With a plan, a policy maker can make an informed decision based on specifics as argued in each round. Without any specific mandate of action, CEDA judges are left to evaluate nebulous policy implications without the adequate specific information mandated by the paradigm. At best, the critic is projecting not only their own ideas concerning the policy directions inherent within the topic but also those advanced by the teams involved. At worst, the critic is being forced to make a decision based on guess work, intuition and inferior forms of proof. Although some might argue that current national legislative bodies act in this manner, its application to academic debate is questionable.

Another paradigm not quite as popular as that of decision-making is hypothesis testing. In a policy context, hypothesis

testing attempts to apply a scientific method of inquiry into a social science arena. An hypothesis testing paradigm would allow the judge to evaluate a variety of options, each designed to test the relative truth of the resolution. Ultimately, this sort of inquiry attempts to determine not only the truth of the resolution but also where the greatest amount of risk is located within the parameters of the resolution. Utilizing this paradigm, a comparison of specific policy options can often become the focus of a policy round.

Application of the hypothesis testing paradigm in CEDA is as problematic as application of the paradigm in policy debate. Although the method allows for an examination of several areas from within the resolution, trying to superimpose a scientific method onto an academic debate is difficult. With both policy and CEDA, time limits set an artificial boundary with regard to how much information can be presented and processed. If the round were not limited in terms of time, inquiry could continue until all relevant areas had been adequately discussed. At that point, any critic could make a decision with the relative assurance that they were acting on the best and most through representation of the facts possible. This utopian situation is precluded in a debate setting. With only eight speeches, each constricted with a definite time limit, discussion of issues must remain focused in order to present the most compelling and

relevant information possible. Hypothesis testing often results in only a superficial discussion of several issues, none of which developed to their maximum potential. From a scientific perspective, this sort of inquiry would result only in more experimentation before any decision could be rendered. In an academic debate however, the judge is forced to make a decision at the end of the prescribed time limit regardless of how much additional inquiry is necessary to produce a definitive conclusion.

The problem with application of hypothesis testing to CEDA debate is exacerbated due to the lack of specific policy directives. It is much easier to compare existing policies, or a variety of alternative policies produced outside of the resolution, to the Affirmative plan than it is to discuss any alternatives in a CEDA context.

The final most often cited paradigm available to a debate critic is that of tabula rosa. This paradigm presents the critic as a "blank slate," capable of being directed by those involved with the debate itself. A tabula rosa critic votes on the issues presented in each individual round irrespective of their personal biases or preferences. More importantly, a critic adopting this paradigm, by definition, must rely on the debaters in each round to direct their focus and demonstrate how issues are to be evaluated. Arguably, the tabula rosa critic is one which is

precluded from intervening into the debate round. Instead, they must limit their focus to the flow and vote based on the directives issued by the teams in each round.

Unfortunately, application of this paradigm in policy or CEDA debate is, again, utopian. In order for this paradigm to function, the teams must be capable of giving the critic specific instructions regarding the evaluation of issues. This type of direction can often involve a level of skill and sophistication lacking in the majority of debaters. More importantly, even if the debaters are equally skilled, their directions to a critic can differ greatly regarding how to evaluate various issues within a round. At some point the critic must violate the spirit of the tabula rosa paradigm and make a decision regarding which set of instructions are to be followed in reaching a decision. At this level, the personal beliefs or preferences of the critic can become the guiding force in rendering a decision. Although technically the critic is still voting as directed by at least one team, they have still filtered the decision making through their own set of biases and/or preferences.

An additional problem with the tabula rosa paradigm is that it dehumanizes the critic. Instead of being an educator offering directions and/or constructive criticism to the participants, this paradigm can act to reduce the critic to the level of a robot, programmed by individuals who may still be struggling with

the instruction manual for the activity. Granted, the line between education and intervention can be a very thin one for any critic regardless of policy or value constraints. Unfortunately, the tabula rosa paradigm gives the critic a justification to abandon their role of "educator" and become, instead, a passive observer of the scenario played out in each round.

An Alternative: The Skills Paradigm

Because the application of existing paradigms to CEDA debate is often problematic, new perspectives regarding decision making in CEDA is justified. One such alternative is the suggestion of a skills paradigm. Although only one possible alternative, the skills paradigm may assist in offering critics and participants a more definitive model for decision making in CEDA rounds of debate.

The skills paradigm is based on the idea that debate is an activity governed by a limited set of rules and expectations. For example, one expectation might be that direct clash is essential in formulating the voting issues in a debate round. Another expectation might be that structure and organization are necessary for development of those issues to occur throughout a debate round in a logical and coherent fashion. A critic then acts as an evaluator of the skills reflected in the individuals engaged in each debate.

A skills paradigm for CEDA debate offers some unique opportunities and challenges for both debaters and judges. Debaters are still allowed to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in a variety of areas. They are still free to argue whatever positions they choose in each given round. They must, however, demonstrate their skill in terms of understanding those positions and applying them in each round. Debaters could not, for example, run the same topicality argument each negative round if that topicality argument does not apply to a specific affirmative without first, justifying that approach. To run an argument automatically each round would not demonstrate sound argumentation skills and could serve to only muddle a round. Choosing when and how to apply an argument is a skill which can be evaluated from that perspective in a round.

From the perspective of the critic, the skills paradigm mandates that they be an educator. A critic would still be free (and encouraged) to set standards for the debaters in each round to meet in order to demonstrate skills. For example, if a critic dislikes rapid delivery, excessive grammatical topicality arguments or any other tactic, they should be free to notify the teams before each round. At that point, each team is aware of the expectations of that critic and are free to comply or develop an approach intended to alter the perception of the critic. The round can then be evaluated based on which team demonstrated the

most skill at accomplishing their objective. If the critic feels that a team has failed to demonstrate adequate skills in any area, they are free to make such comments and explain how that affected the overall decision in the specific round.

It is important to note that the skills paradigm is not intended to legitimate judge intervention into a round. The paradigm is based on the idea that the teams in each round should decide how the round evolves with regard to issue development. Just because a judge may not like a tactic does not mean that teams must not argue those positions. Instead, if a team feels that they are skillful enough to run the argument properly or in a compelling or unique manner, they should be allowed to do so without the judge intervening based on personal bias. How the team attempted to present the argument should be evaluated based on their skills in terms of understanding and presenting the argument. Regardless of the paradigm, the line between education and intervention will remain very narrow.

For both critic and judge, the skills paradigm offers a more definitive criteria by which to judge a CEDA round. The skills paradigm minimizes the lack of specific policy alternatives and, instead, allows the debaters to argue those implications as they see fit. The critic then evaluates the round based on which team demonstrates the most skill in choosing and arguing positions within the round. If a team wants the critic to evaluate policy

implications, they are free to pursue that line of argumentation. The unique feature of this paradigm is that the team must also demonstrate an understanding of the concept which, optimistically, could improve the level of their arguments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to address the need for further refinement of decision making paradigms specifically within CEDA debate. An attempt has been made to review three paradigms currently utilized in NDT debate namely policy-making, hypothesis testing and tabula rosa. Since application of each in CEDA debate raises difficulties, a new paradigm based on the skills exhibited by the individuals involved in the debate round seems not only justified but logical. By examining the skills demonstrated by the debaters in a round, a critic can render a decision and assist in the growth and educational development of each student. Perhaps more importantly, debaters can offer arguments of choice while demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of both relevant theories as well as sound debate techniques.